

DOCUMENT-IDENTIFIER: US 20010020231 A1

TITLE: Marketing System and Method

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Abstract Paragraph - ABTX (1):

A computer assisted compensation method is provided. The compensation method comprises sending a message from a first party to a second party, wherein the message includes a link to a processor and the link has a sponsor identifier, having the second party select the link to contact the processor, correlating the first party with the second party, and providing credit to the first party for an activity of the second party. A compensation system and an apparatus that performs a compensation function are also provided. A computer assisted marketing method is also provided. The computer assisted marketing method includes identifying a referrer, correlating a referred consumer and the referrer that referred the consumer, receiving referred consumer purchase information, calculating compensation due to the referrer for referred consumer activity, transferring consumer activity related data to a merchant storage device, and transferring consumer activity related data to a non-merchant storage device. A marketing system and an apparatus that performs a marketing function are also provided.

Background of Invention Paragraph - BGTX (9):

[0010] A second method used to drive "traffic" and business to a web site is an affiliate program. The term "traffic" is intended to describe the number of consumers that access, purchase from or otherwise interface with a web site or a merchant's advertising or sales media. An affiliate program is a program that allows a web site owner to place a link to, for example, a product and/or a service and receive a commission for purchases made that resulted from a user selecting a link on the affiliate program participant's web site. Affiliate programs solve the problem of not paying out advertising dollars until a purchase is actually made. However, affiliate programs are only available to people that have a web site, or have the knowledge to set one up. Also, an affiliate program will only be effective if the advertising web site can actually drive enough traffic to the advertised web site to make the program an effective advertising medium. Therefore, the banner ad method is often inefficient and the affiliate program method is often ineffective.

Summary of Invention Paragraph - BSTX (2):

[0014] In accordance with one form of the present invention, there is provided a computer assisted compensation method, comprising sending a message from a first party to a second party, wherein the message includes a link to a processor and the link has a sponsor identifier, having the second party select

the link to contact the processor, correlating the first party with the second party, and providing credit to the first party for an activity of the second party.

Summary of Invention Paragraph - BSTX (3):

[0015] A compensation system is also provided. The compensation system includes a processor and a memory device in communication with the processor, the memory device having data and instructions stored thereon which, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to send a message to a first party for forwarding to a second party, wherein the message includes a link to a processor and the link has a sponsor identifier, receive an inquiry from the second party, wherein said inquiry is initiated by the second party selecting the link, correlate the sponsor identifier of the first party with an activity of the second party, and provide credit to the first party for an activity of the second party.

Summary of Invention Paragraph - BSTX (4):

[0016] A computer readable medium is also provided, wherein the computer readable medium has instructions stored thereon which, when executed by a processor, cause said processor to send a message to a first party for forwarding to a second party, wherein the message includes a link to the processor and the link has a sponsor identifier, receive an inquiry from the second party, wherein the inquiry is initiated by

the second party selecting the link, correlate the sponsor identifier of the first party with an activity of the second party, and provide credit to the first party for activity of the second party.

Detail Description Paragraph - DETX (4):

[0053] Referring now to the figures for the purposes of illustrating the present preferred embodiments of the invention only and not for the purposes of limiting the same, Figure 1 is a diagram illustrating a three-party viral marketing system 10, wherein consumers and merchants interact through a viral marketing provider. Alternatively, the marketing system 10 may be provided directly by the merchant. The system depicted in Figure 1 includes a user 110 accessing a web site 510 having access to a system provider database 80 and a third party database 90 by way of a web robot software 70. The web robot software 70 provides the following third party merchant functionality. In the three-party system illustrated, one or more consumers contact the merchant by, for example, accessing a web site through which the merchant's goods and/or services may be purchased. Once the consumer has accessed the web site, the consumer may purchase those goods or services, or may participate in desired on-line activities such as viewing or listening to advertisements and may also access the present marketing system. The consumer may also participate in the web site by becoming a member of that site and referring others to the site.

The consumer may furthermore receive credit for his own participation in the web site and for referring others to the web site.

Detail Description Paragraph - DETX (6):

[0055] An advantage of the present system to merchants is that a marketer may create and administer the system in connection with an existing merchant web site with little effort required on the part of the merchant. The merchant may simply add a link from the merchant's current web site to the system. The system may then provide the system screens discussed herein, while retaining the merchant's web site border such that the screen continues to have the look and feel of the merchant's web site. The member may also return to the merchant web site when the desired system transaction has been completed.

Detail Description Paragraph - DETX (19):

[0068] Figure 7 illustrates an embodiment of a flow through the membership registration module 100 of Figure 2. At Step 210, the user 110 may access the web site using, for example, an Internet connection and a web browser. The web site may, for example, use a uniform resource locator (URL) recognition mechanism to detect whether the member 110 has a sponsor identifier, and was, therefore, referred by a member of the site. For example, a user 110 that came to the web site with a sponsor identifier could have a URL such as "http://www.yourwebsite.com/default.asp?id=username." The URL recognition

mechanism may then analyze the URL and recognize that the present user was referred by the member whose user name is "username." If, on the other hand, the member 110 came to the web site of the member's own accord and has not come by way of a referral mechanism, the URL utilized could be, for example, "http://www.yourwebsite.com." The URL recognition mechanism may recognize that the present user was not referred by another member because no sponsor identifier is included in that URL. Thus, by automatically including the sponsor identifier in the prospective member's URL when the URL is created, the system may recognize that the prospective member was referred to the web site and also may determine the member that referred the prospective member.

Detail Description Paragraph - DETX (20):

[0069] Either of the above URL links will take the user 110 to the home page of the web site. As outlined in Step 215 of Figure 7, the user 110 may click on a button or hyperlink that says, for example, "Join," and the system will take the user to the online registration form 132 when selected. If the user 110 had come to the site with a URL that includes a sponsor identifier, resembling, for example, "http://www.yourwebsite.com/default.asp?id=username," then the field labeled "sponsor identifier" could be automatically filled in by the URL recognition mechanism. However, if the user 110 had come to the site through a URL that does not include a sponsor

identifier, resembling, for example, "http://www.yourwebsite.com," then the sponsor identifier could be blank.

Detail Description Paragraph - DETX (23):

[0072] At step 235, a second email, which may be termed a "referral gateway" is sent to the member 110. The referral gateway may consist of text that informs a potential member of the salient points of the program and may include a hyperlink to the system web site that includes the new member's sponsor identifier. The sponsor identifier may be embedded into the email via the hyperlink so that if a potential member clicks on it, and then subsequently registers for the program, the referring member will get credit for the referral. The referral gateway provides members an easy way to refer additional members to the program and seamlessly, from the perspective of the member, receive credit for that referral.

Detail Description Paragraph - DETX (27):

[0076] Figure 10 is a flow diagram of an embodiment of a flow through the member referral module 500 of Figure 2. Once the user 110 becomes a member 110, the member 110 may refer others to the site through the use of the member referral module 500. As shown in Figure 10, the member 110 may return to the web site at step 510 and then log in with the member's user name 250 and password 255, which comprise a "login process" shown at step 515. After the member 110 logs in, the member 110 may select from

multiple referral mechanisms at step 520 of Figure 10. Each one of the referral mechanisms 520 may be embedded with the member's sponsor identifier at step 525 automatically by retrieving the member's sponsor identifier from the member registration database 160. Once it has been prepared, the referral mechanism is forwarded to one or more potential new members 130. A potential new member 130 may then access the web site at step 530 by, for example, selecting a link from the referral mechanism. At step 535, the potential new member 130 may register and at step 540, the registration module 100 may check the registration data and accept the new member 130. At step 545, the new member 130 is provided an account through which the original member 110 may receive credit for any participation of the new member 130.

Detail Description Paragraph - DETX (28):

[0077] Figure 11 is a flow diagram illustrating four possible referral mechanisms which include email, a referral gateway, a banner, and a handout. Email and the referral gateway are relatively quick and easy to use. As illustrated in Figure 11, the member 110 may access the web site at step 555, access his sponsor identifier at step 560 and attach that sponsor identifier to an email at step 565, a referral gateway at step 570, a banner ad on a web site at step 575 and/or a handout at step 580. The referral mechanism is then forwarded to one or more potential members 130. At step 590, the sponsor

identifier of the referring member 110 is communicated to the web site when the potential member 130 becomes a member so that the referring member 110 receives credit for new member 130 activity.

Detail Description Paragraph - DETX (29):

[0078] Figure 12 illustrates an example of a process that may be utilized in connection with the referral gateway. At step 595, the member 110 receives the referral gateway in an email box after they have requested it be sent to them from the site. The referral gateway may include text that describes the benefits of the program and contains a link to the program's web site that has the member's sponsor identifier "embedded" in it. For example, the referral gateway may include standard but modifiable language that is automatically produced by the system for forwarding to the person being referred. The modifiable message may read, for example, "Thought you would enjoy this site. It looks like a great opportunity. It costs nothing to register and they'll even pay you a percentage for referring your friends. Check it out." At step 600, the member 110 forwards the referral gateway to a potential member 130. The subject line of the email may state "Message from "Member's Name"" to inform a known potential member 130 that the email is not spam, but, rather, is a personal message from the member 110. At step 605, the person being referred 130 receives the email. The email may explain the benefits of membership to both the person being referred 130 and the

referring member 110. At step 610, the email recipient is given an opportunity to become a member by, for example, clicking on a link that takes the email recipient 130 to the web site. The email recipient 130 may then access the online registration form 132 to become a member. The sponsor identifier box may be automatically filled in where the web site is capable of recognizing and capturing the sponsor identifier of the referring member 110 which is carried to the web site link from referral email. Thus, at step 615, when the email recipient 130 becomes a member, the original member 110 receives credit for referral by way of the sponsor identifier.

Claims Text - CLTX (2):

What is claimed is:1. A computer-assisted compensation method, comprising:sending a message from a first party to a second party, wherein the message includes a link and the link has a sponsor identifier;selecting, by the second party, the link;correlating the sponsor identifier of the first party with the second party; andproviding credit to the first party.

Claims Text - CLTX (11):

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the email includes a URL that provides access to a web site and includes the sponsor identifier.

Claims Text - CLTX (13):

12. A compensation system, comprising:a

processor; and a memory device in communication with said processor, the memory device having data and instructions stored thereon which, when executed by said processor, cause said processor to: send a message to a first party for forwarding to a second party, wherein the message includes a link and the link has a sponsor identifier; receive an inquiry from the second party, wherein said inquiry is initiated by the second party selecting the link; correlate the sponsor identifier of the first party with an activity of the second party; and provide credit to the first party for the activity of the second party.

Claims Text - CLTX (14):

13. A computer readable medium having instructions stored thereon which, when executed by a processor, cause said processor to: send a message to a first party for forwarding to a second party, wherein the message includes a link to said processor and the link has a sponsor identifier; receive an inquiry from the second party, wherein the inquiry is initiated by the second party selecting the link; correlate the sponsor identifier of the first party with an activity of the second party; and provide credit to the first party for the activity of the second party.

Claims Text - CLTX (15):

14. An apparatus, comprising: means for sending a message from a first party to a second party, wherein the message includes a

link and the link has a
sponsor identifier; means for selecting, by the
second party, the link; means for
correlating the sponsor identifier of the first
party with the second party;
and means for providing credit to the first party
for an activity of the second
party.